

Freedom and Life

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn back for a short while to Romans chapter 8. We're going to look again at the passage that we read, but we can just read the words of verse 2.

Romans chapter 8 is a quite remarkable chapter. As you read through these verses, there is just a constant outpouring of glorious theology, of astonishing promises, and of precious words of reassurance and comfort. It's a chapter that is just full of so many wonderful things. And it's telling us all about the amazing transformation that trusting in Jesus Christ will bring to your life and mine.

And so in many ways I want us to always make sure that Romans 8 is a chapter that we have close to our hearts and in our minds. It's a go-to chapter. It's the kind of chapter that you want to constantly return to in your Christian life.

And if you're ever explaining the gospel to others, we started looking at this chapter last week and we focus on chapter 1, verse 1, and we were asking the question, what difference does it make to be a Christian?

And verse 1 gives us the amazing answer that says that now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Verse 1 gives you this absolutely astonishing promise, these wonderful words of blessing.

[1 : 53] But of course verse 1 is just verse 1. There are many more and Paul is just beginning. Because the rest of the chapter goes on to summarize more of the blessings and privileges that are ours if you are a follower of Jesus or if you become one.

And so we'll spend the next three or four Sundays looking at chapter 8, but as we often say, even then we will barely scratch the surface. One of the great truths that lies at the heart of Romans and that lies at the heart of the whole New Testament is the doctrine of union with Christ.

The fact that by faith we are united to Jesus Christ, that means that we participate in his death and resurrection. And we share in all that his finished work has accomplished. That union with Christ is conveyed again and again and again in the New Testament by a very short but beautiful phrase, in Christ.

And it's there in verse 2, the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus. We are united to Jesus Christ by faith.

That is what lies at the heart of the Gospel. True Christianity is all about being united to Jesus Christ by faith.

[3 : 25] But the glory of the Gospel goes even further than that. And Paul is teaching us here that not only are we in Christ if we are trusting in him, but Christ is also in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

So you become a Christian, you are in Christ. You become a Christian, Christ comes to dwell in you by his spirit.

And that indwelling of the Holy Spirit is at the heart of what Paul writes in chapter 8. If you want homework, when you get home, read through chapter 8 and count the amount of times the Holy Spirit is mentioned.

Just see how many times Paul refers to him. Whenever anyone becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within them.

Paul says in verse 9, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ doesn't belong to him. Likewise, he says in verse Corinthians, you are a temple of the Holy Spirit. So as we study this chapter, we're going to be learning more about the Holy Spirit's work when he comes to make his dwelling within us as Christians.

[4 : 44] We're going to do it bit by bit. And this week, we're going to look at the section from verses 2 to verse 11. And here we discovered that when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, it means that we have two wonderful things. We have freedom and we have life.

That's what Paul highlights here. The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Now, when you read a verse like Romans 8 too, just speaking for myself, I find that's the kind of verse that I read and I think I'm not entirely sure what that means.

And it's one of these verses, although the language has fairly stayed forward, there's no sort of complicated words there. It can be, well certainly for me, I don't completely know what Paul means here. And so when you do ask the question, what exactly is Paul saying?

Well, I think what Paul is saying is this, that if you take God's law, God's standard of righteousness, the requirements that he expects of us, these statutes that tell us what sin is and what sin isn't, what righteousness is, what righteousness isn't.

[6 : 11] Paul is looking at God's law and he is saying that whether or not you are in Christ makes a massive difference in terms of how you relate to God's law.

So for example, I want you to first of all imagine somebody in your minds who is not united to Christ, someone hostile to the Gospel, somebody who would not regard Jesus as their Savior.

And I want us to think about how that person relates to the law. And there's two questions that we have to ask of that person. We'll put the questions on the screen. Two questions to ask this person. Have the requirements of the law been fulfilled?

And question two, has sin been dealt with in the person who is not united to Christ? And as I'm sure you know, as I'm sure you have concluded yourself, for the person who is not united to Christ, the answer to both of those questions is no.

In terms of question one, none of us can say that we have fulfilled all the requirements of the law. None of us, I don't think, would come to God and say, you can scrutinize every single part of my life and you will find that I have obeyed your law perfectly.

[7 : 35] None of us can say that. I think in fact, none of us could even say that regarding the civil legislation of the United Kingdom. So if we were to go up to Parliament and say scrutinize every part of my life and you'll see that I've never broken any of the civil laws of the UK, I couldn't do that.

How many of us went over 40 miles an hour when we drove to church today? I probably did. I certainly do quite often. And so if we can't even do it with the law of the United Kingdom, we can't do it with the law of God.

So the answer to that question is no. Second question, has sin been dealt with? The answer to that question again is no. Because God's forbearance means that we have not yet fallen into the full severity of the eternal consequences of our sin.

In other words, you're not in hell. You're here. We're not there. But our failure to fulfill the requirements of the law does make us liable to the implications of question two.

In other words, without Christ, we face condemnation and it is only the forbearance of God that has enabled us to still be here.

[9 : 07] So the law highlights our failure and the law delivers a sentence of condemnation. And that's perfectly logical. All laws do that if we fail to keep them.

The result is that if we're not united to Christ, then the law which really should be promising us life is in fact a law of sin and death, because it shows that we are sinners and it justly administers the consequences of that sin, which is death.

So without Christ, we are in desperate, perilous danger. Now I want you to imagine somebody who is in Christ, someone who is united to Jesus, in other words, someone who is trusting in him.

Ask the same two questions. Have the requirements of the law been fulfilled in that person? The answer is yes. And the reason the answer is yes is because through union with Jesus Christ, it means that the fact that Christ perfectly obeyed the law and the fact that Christ perfectly fulfilled the requirements and the fact that he is righteous means that if we are united to him, then that righteousness is counter to us.

So the requirements of the law have been filled in Christ. Has sin been dealt with? Yes it has. Because again Jesus took the punishment for our sins upon himself on the cross and if we are united to him, it means that when he died, we died.

[10 : 49] He has taken our punishment. Our sin has been dealt with. Our debt has been paid. So without Christ, have the requirements of the law been fulfilled? No. Has sin been dealt with? No. Therefore the law is highlighting your sin. It's a law of death.

But in Christ, have you met the requirements for the law? Yes. Has your sin been dealt with? Yes it has. Therefore instead of being condemned as a sinner and facing death, you are now free and you are now alive.

The law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. It's the same law, but if you're in Christ, then you have a totally different relationship to it.

In him, all the requirements of the law have been fulfilled. All the consequences of sin have been dealt with. Paul talks about that, says how he condemned sin in Christ and the requirement of the law has been fulfilled.

That means that if you are a Christian or if you become one, you're no longer condemned. No condemnation for you. You have freedom and you have life.

[12 : 16] Now this is a very, very, very important thing to recognise because a lot of people today and a lot of people probably in our community would say or would think that if you become a Christian, then you're going to lose your freedom and you're going to spoil your life.

People think that it's by turning their backs on Jesus that they're going to have freedom and life. So people will say to you, live your life, go, have some freedom.

Yeah, maybe become a Christian later when you're older and when you've kind of lost interest in all things exciting. Leave it until then. Live your life to snow. People think that to be free means to do whatever you like. Nobody tells you what to do.

So go live a free life where you do your own thing. You get lots of different experiences. You can pursue lots of different opportunities. That's the world's view of freedom and life. Now it is absolutely vital that we recognise that that view of life and that view of freedom is about a second class as you can possibly get.

It is a pitiful understanding of life and freedom.

[13 : 56] The world says, go and be free. Do what you like. But the biblical concept of freedom is not go and do what you like. The biblical concept of freedom is go and become everything that you were created to be.

If God is our creator, then we will thrive most when we are conforming to what he has made us to be.

The world says go and make the most of your life because life is short. Go and achieve a lot.

But the biblical concept of life is not merely achieving a lot. The biblical concept of life is to know God and to glorify and enjoy him forever.

In other words, the freedom and life that the Bible promises you is a million times better than anything that you will have if you reject Jesus.

[15 : 07] So the world says, come follow me and you will be free from the burden of the Ten Commandments, free from the routine of going to church, free from the hassle of responsibility. Jesus says, follow me and you will be free from death and from hell. The world says, go and enjoy the next 50 years of your life or however long you have.

Jesus says, come and enjoy the endless ages of eternity with me.

The freedom and the life that the Gospel offers is far, far better. And it's reminding us that being in Christ makes a massive difference to your life. It gives you freedom. It gives you life.

And so Paul then gives more details in verses 3 to 11 regarding these great truths. And I want us just to highlight two things very quickly before we conclude.

Truth number one that Paul highlights is that the freedom and the life that we now have or that you can have in Christ is all because of God.

[16 : 26] Look at verses 3 and 4. What God has done, God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do. Paul is highlighting a vital truth that the whole reason that we can have freedom and life is because of what God has done.

God has intervened and the reason he's done that is because on our own we couldn't do it. We were captive, we were weak, we were incapable and the law was incapable of bringing us life.

And so there was nothing that we could do. So God did it. God did it. And what did God do?

He sent his son. Now that's the kind of phrase that we can whizz through but we need to pause at those words and please just think about these words.

Because they are describing the most monumental act of kindness and mercy and love that eternity has ever witnessed. In order to rescue you from weakness and incapacity and ultimate hopelessness, God gave his son.

[17 : 43] You parents and I'm a parent, would I give my child for anything? I don't think I would. I don't think I could.

God gave his son for you. God gave his son for you. And that meant that he had to become like us. He had to come in the likeness of sinful flesh.

That meant that he had to come for sin as you see there in verse 3. And in the flesh of the beloved son of God, sin was condemned. See that at the end of verse 3.

And so the reason that there is no condemnation for us is because our sin was condemned in him. The righteous requirement of the law was fulfilled. Our failure is his burden. His perfection is counted to us.

And here we see just the amazing abundance of the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. If you put your trust in Jesus, then your sin has been condemned.

[19 : 01] That means it's been totally dealt with. So just think about that. Think about every time you have mucked up in your life. Think of every bitter regret you have in your life.

Think of every weakness and failure that makes you think that God could never love someone like me. If you put your trust in Jesus, then all of that, all of it, has been condemned. It's gone. It's dealt with. It'll never come back.

Every requirement has been met. Paul is telling us that when it comes to salvation, it's all because of what God has done.

And you know, that is really what lies at the heart of a Christian's testimony. We often talk about testimonies, people talking about how they came to faith.

And it's an important thing to think about because sometimes we can maybe have a mistaken view of what's essential. Often when we talk about how people become a Christian, we tend to think that there has to be some kind of dramatic experience or very, very powerful feelings or a remarkable or sudden event taking place.

[20 : 25] Now, sometimes these things do happen, but because we hear about these things, we tend to think that these things have to happen. And so there's lots of people who will think, well, these things haven't happened to me. Therefore, I can't be a Christian. But the vital point is that the thing that matters in any testimony is not the dramatic events, not the remarkable experience, not the astonishing feelings.

The vital point in any testimony is not about us. It's not about our experience, not about what we felt, not about what events that have taken place. The vital point is that our testimony is about what God has done.

That is the rock that we cling to, that God has done it, that God has done everything that we need, and we are relying on Him.

And so if you are a Christian who struggles with doubts, if you're somebody who's maybe not even professed faith yet, because you feel that some kind of assurance hasn't come, please remember these words, God has done it.

It's not about what you have done, it's about what God has done. When you see the failings in your own body, remember God has done it. When you feel the burden of sin, remember that God has done it.

[21 : 53] When you feel that you lack assurance, remember God has done everything that was needed. And never ever forget that if God has done it, then there's nothing lacking.

And if God has done it, nothing can undo it. And if you are not yet a Christian, then please, please hear the voice of God speaking to you today.

God is saying, if you want to be saved from the power and penalty of sin, if you want to have freedom, if you want to have life that is eternal, if you want to be my child, I'll do it all.

Just trust me. Just trust me. That's what the whole story of the Bible is.

It's a great record of God saying, these people need to be saved. I'll do it. I'll do it all. Which is why all he asks us to do is trust him. To trust in everything that he has done.

[23 : 23] Paul is reminding us that when it comes to salvation, it's all about what God has done. And the second truth that Paul highlights in these verses is that the freedom and life that we have in Christ brings an amazing transformation in us.

In verse 4, you can see that Paul immediately shifts from talking about God to talking about us. He talks about what God has done in verses 3 and 4 and then halfway through verse 4, he immediately shifts his focus to us, those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

You can see the words highlighted there. Paul is making it very clear that if we are in Christ, then we're different. We are being transformed. There's a lot that we could say in these verses, but I just want to highlight an important progression that Paul sets before us here.

In verse 4b, you can see that he uses the word walk. And whenever Paul uses the word walk, he's talking about our conduct, our way of life, our outward living as Christians.

You see, now as Christians, we walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. In other words, we live and act in a different way.

[24 : 50] We walk according to what God wants. But in the next verses, Paul explains why. He says the reason that we walk in a new way is because we think in a new way.

Look at how many times the word mind appears in those three verses. Paul is emphasizing the fact that as Christians, we think in a new way.

We think in a coherent, consistent, logical God-honoring way. And so instead of thinking in a way that's hostile to God, instead of reacting against God and pushing God away, instead of rebelling against God's commands, our minds are drawn to obey him.

We want to follow him. We want to live for him. Paul's great point is that if we're in Christ, then we're able to think in a new way, in a way that desires to obey God's law.

And the reason that we can do that is because God himself has come to dwell in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit of Christ is in you, in you, in both verse 9 and verse 10.

[26 : 04] And so we can summarize what Paul is saying as follows. We can walk according to the Spirit because we can think according to the Spirit, because we are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

And the point I want to try and set before you is that there is a comprehensive transformation in the life of the person who trusts in Jesus. From the core of your heart, there's a change.

God himself comes to dwell there. And instead of being spiritually dead, you become spiritually alive. And that has an effect. It changes the way you think and that changes the way you live.

And it shows that we are all being thoroughly transformed through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And at the heart of that work that the Holy Spirit is doing is the fact that we are being restored to what we were originally created to be.

As Paul says later in this chapter, God's great goal is that you would be conformed to the image of his Son. And this is one of the many, many places where we see the whole Bible fitting together.

[27 : 21] Because back at the very beginning in Genesis, you had the Spirit of God at work creating the universe. The climax of that creation was the creation of humanity.

And humanity was unique because humanity was made in the image of God. Now in Christ, the same Spirit is at work and the work of recreation is underway.

Whereby we are being restored to that image. We are being made into everything that God wants us to be. Which is why as Christians, we can live a new way, a better way.

We can live in a way that makes the world around us a better place rather than one that's getting worse. That is true freedom. That is the best life that anyone can live.

The Holy Spirit Himself has come to give us life and give us liberty. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

[28 : 45] So in Christ Jesus, you can have freedom. Freedom to be restored to everything that God wants you to be. Freedom to live a life that conforms to the desires of the one who made you.

And in Christ Jesus, you can have life. You can have a wonderful life now. And you can have life that will never end. Life that is more wonderful than words could ever describe.

And surely you want that. Surely you do. And Jesus is calling you.

He is calling you to come to Him. He is saying I'll set you free. I'll give you life. I'll do it all.

And may God grant that we would all run to Him. Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you for the abundance of blessing that we have in Christ Jesus.

[30 : 06] We thank you for the freedom and the life that you give us. And what an amazing blessing that is. How wonderful it is to be free from the power and penalty of sin.

How wonderful it is to have life that will never end. And oh God, we acknowledge that that is only because you gave your Son for us.

And eternity is not long enough to thank you. And we pray that each one of us would look to you and trust in you.

That we would all, all be found in Christ. Amen.